



MDC Resource Science

Community Forestry Officials: Results from a MDC survey

Science Notes



Community Forestry Officials: Results from a MDC Survey



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Information Need:

Missouri Department of Conservation's (MDC) Community Forestry Program advises, coordinates and facilitates the efforts that affect Missouri's community-owned trees. Assistance provided by MDC is targeted at local governments, arborists, non-profit organizations and planning councils. To better understand the knowledge, motivation and behavior of community forestry officials, a survey was mailed to employees in 612 Missouri communities. Our goal was to characterize the local agencies charged with managing urban trees, their budgets and personnel levels, and to determine which urban forestry issues local officials found to be most pressing.

Methods

In 2011 MDC conducted surveys of three groups involved in community forestry: local elected officials (broken down into mayors, council members, etc.), local heads of city departments and urban foresters. The questions in these three surveys were similar to a 2003 MDC survey. All surveys included questions such as which community department was responsible for street tree management, size of budget, and what sources of funds were used. Questions also were included on department size and the educational background of its employees, as well as on equipment, local tree ordinances and familiarity with potential sources of outside money and advice. There were also several sets of questions asking respondents to rank their attitudes towards certain community forestry issues, such as hazard trees, topping, urban sprawl and adequacy of funding and tree maintenance and planting. Slightly different sets of questions were developed for the three groups. The response rates ranged from 21% to 80%, depending on the type of survey and group.

Results

- Responsibility for tree care can be in any one or more of several community agencies. (Figure 1.)
- Over 48% of communities rely on general revenue as their source of funding - which is variable and can change frequently.
- Nearly 50% of respondents said their communities dedicated 0% of the local government budget to tree care and maintenance.
- With no fixed funding, and what funding there is coming from insecure sources, over 65% of respondents' communities have no full-time employees working on tree care, planting and maintenance.
- Only 16% of respondents' communities have a written tree plan but over 25% have an ordinance addressing tree preservation during development.
- Respondents were very aware of the need for managing risk (hazard trees). Tree planting and maintenance were also recognized as being important. Inventory was not seen as

important by most. MDC may be able to change this attitude by highlighting tree inventory as part of a risk management program. (Figure 2.)

- Very few respondents thought people in their communities would be willing to pay more (in taxes) for a better community forestry program: of Mayors responding 20.7% agreed, while only 17.6% of department heads agreed.

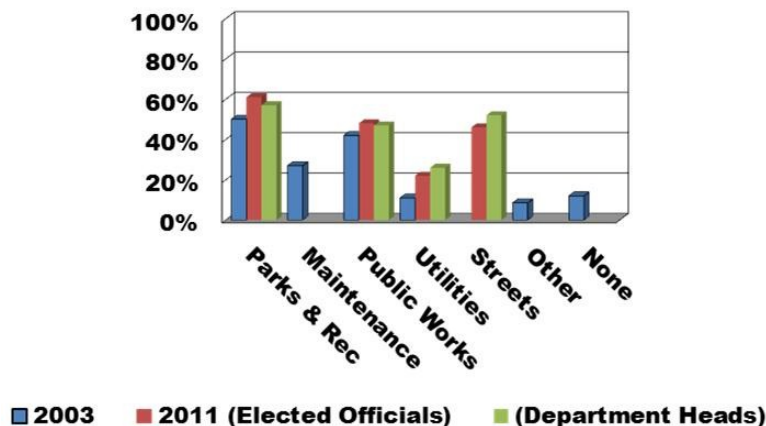


Figure 1. Community Departments responsible for tree care. Results from the 2011 and 2003 surveys.

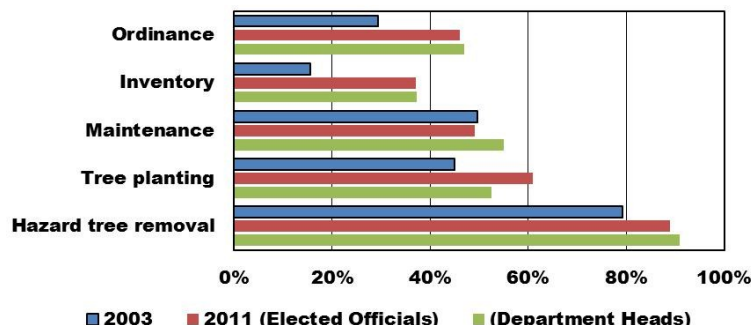


Figure 2. What's important in a community tree program? Results from the 2011 and 2003 surveys.

Using the Information

MDC's urban foresters and policy makers will be able to use these findings to improve community understanding of their urban forest resource and to design more effective outreach, education and grant programs to help Missouri's communities to conserve this valuable asset.

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